

Exercise in Anti-Pavlovian Preparation for Ingestion

First there is holding limbs to the body firmly
while removing the head with one blow.
Clamping limbs to the body tightly.
Do not allow struggle to spatter the blood-flow.

Next you must pluck the covering quickly.
While head's removed you can't be cruel.
Ripping and jerking the insulation away,
allowing the stiffening body to cool.

Now slit the pimpled skin, the congealing fat,
to bring out handfuls of liver, sacks of dung.
Now scrape out the stubborn kidney with your thumb.
Reach deeper and deeper for pink sponge lung.

And now you can bend, wrench joints. Snap out
limbs from sockets. Cut cold cartilage back.
Greasy, dismembered. Quartered and drawn.
Parts arranged to grill in their juice on the rack.

They call this "preparing a meal."

To a Chicken House Destroyed By a Poet Seeking Lumber for His House

Old house, you die hard. I could build
two of you with the muscle, time, split fingers,
spent to tear you down. No one
lived here but some chickens --
no drama played out here. None but the common
cycle of egg to hen and down to death again.
Maybe a fox to prowl. To set you squawking
like a juke-box in the night. Weasles letting
blood to stain the floor. Rats to walk
your timbers, stealing meal. No drama comes
to chicken houses. No telegrams at night
of boys at war. No babies claw for breath.
Just eggs collected. The hatchet handy,
and the chopping block behind the door.

Yes, old shed, you die hard for just
an aging chicken house. Broken open already
to the weather. Porcupines have come to gnaw
blood-salt from your floor. Every wrinkled nail
drawn out and saved. You were built well.
I pay respect to clever hands and hammers
of 30 years ago. Out of respect nails are saved

to straighten through some winter nights.
Saving boards. Studs. Lay them all straight.
Building a pile of seasoned lumber from
your awkward shape. I think I have not razed
a building only, but have built again
that which you were when both you and I
were young. When we both still "might have been."

In your destruction we employ those same tools
used in your construction. The hammer that found
these nails home now backs them out. We see now
how the blunt head, reversed, becomes a claw.
Dumb nails, driven without complaint, squall
at their withdrawal. The long union of steel
and wood has changed them both. You were built well,
but in your destruction we reveal some weakness.
Doorsill, retracted, brings to light the rot
where water, trapped, corrupted board and metal both.
Here where a floor joist touched the earth
began slow death our surgery arrested. What's born
again from these boards will, in turn, be tested.

-- Robert M. Chute

Naples, Maine

Remarkable How

these old men play checkers in the square all day
even when it rains
they move the game into the bandshell
even when everything else has stopped for lunch
they send to the drugstore for sandwiches, and say
It's your move, Goddamnit.

even when one of them has arthritis
and can't

they send across to the bar, for whisky.
That'll cure you, damnit. Play.

even when the negroes march around them
shaking posters.

What do those damn posters say?

Same old horseshit.

Some folks never satisfied. Anyway.

Got you cornered, ain't I? Play.

even after assassinations
those old men play checkers in the square all day.

-- Ruth Moon Kempher

St. Augustine, Florida